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ABSTRACT

The current style-specific theories of human communication include the public speaking style, the relationship style, and the message communication style. It now appears that intercultural communication may emerge as the fourth style-specific theory as a result of scholars' concern over the ethnocentric bias found in the study of communication. The claim that intercultural communication is a style-specific theory is significant inasmuch as it guides and clarifies research goals. A focus on the development of intercultural communication as a style-specific theory should encourage researchers to find the best means of describing intercultural encounters and explicating the most critical factors in this type of encounter. This can be accomplished by discourse analysis, which concentrates on the study of conversation, especially dyadic conversation. In particular, attention should be paid to changes in the structure of the conversation or the outcomes of the conversation based on cultural differences. Of significant interest should be the ways interactants' knowledge of conversation varies. And finally, for discourse analysis to become a fruitful avenue of research, the analysts should adopt a rhetorical perspective, thus providing more information about the interaction and increasing levels of awareness. (HOD)

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A New Relationship:

Intercultural Communication and Discourse Analysis

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In the past decade, intercultural communication has burgeoned as an area of research in Speech Communication. There is a growing body of research and a steady increase in the number of courses taught on campuses across the country. With this flurry of activity, scholars have raised a number of questions about the direction of research in intercultural communication. Of foremost concern is the evolution of theories of intercultural communication. In the development of theories, many scholars claim that " what is needed at this juncture is more description of the intercultural communication process" (Asante, Newmark and Blake, 1979: 12).

This paper will address the issue of the development of theory in intercultural research and confirm the need for descriptive research. In that process, I will specify the kind of theory we should be working toward and clarify the underlying assumptions and goals of a theory of intercultural communication. Furthermore, I will suggest a method of conducting research that will be congruent with the kind of theory proposed. My specific proposal is that intercultural communication is a style-specific theory and discourse analysis is an appropriate research tool for the development of a style-specific theory.

The concept of a style-specific theory was introduced by Bormann (1980). He has used the concept of a style-specific theory as a means of explaining research in several areas in Speech Communication (i.e. rhetorical theory, communication theory and interpersonal communication research). Bormann distinguishes between two types of theories: 1) general theory and 2) style-specific theory. A general theory of human communication is a set of generalizations about communication that can be made regardless of the specific context in which it takes place. General theories are "more universal formulations which account for the communication features common

to several or many or all such communities [bound by patterns of usage]" (Bormann,1980:4).

Bormann's major claim is the observation that most of the research in Speech Communication concerns the development of style-specific theories not general theories of human communication. Style-specific theories are based on the assumption that communication scholars study different communication styles. These communication styles are "the broad and common communication usage of a community of people" (Bormann,1980:76). This "community of people" understands "the common language usages and the usual rites and rituals surrounding communication contexts and episodes" (p.76). Furthermore, the evolution of a style-specific theory based on a particular communication style has guidelines for the practice and evaluation of the style and includes exemplar models of the communication style.

The current style-specific theories include the public speaking style, the relationship style and the message communication style. These theories are from the traditional subdivisions in our field known as rhetorical theory, interpersonal communication and communication theory, respectively. Each style developed because members of the community became disturbed by here-and-now problems and "violate[d] the norms, customs and rules of established styles" (p.76). With the emergence of a new style, a new vision of social reality also develops accompanied by the new guidelines for practicing the style. These style-specific theories are also not static but "evolve and develop in a dynamic fashion over time" (p.97).

It is my contention that intercultural communication is the fourth style-specific theory. The emergence of an intercultural communication style began when groups of scholars became disturbed by the ethnocentric bias found in the study of communication. The isolation of this problem among

communication scholars also coincided with a growing national and international awareness of the interdependency of all nations. The facility to communicate across cultures has become even more important. Consequently, a new social reality emerged among some members of the field of Speech Communication and, as a result, intercultural communication emerged as an area of research in the field. This new area of research "attempts to shed the trappings of ethnocentrism and explain the communicative act in its own terms" (Asante, Newmark and Blake,1979:12). Intercultural communication also seeks "to explicate the dissimilarities and similarities which impede or enhance communication across cultures" (p. 11).

To teach and conduct research in this communication style, experts focus on concepts such as cultural values, different verbal and nonverbal communication norms, stereotyping, prejudice, culture shock and re-entry problems. Exemplar models also exist under the rubric of the multicultural person.[1]

It is evident that intercultural communication meets the criteria for a new style-specific theory. There is a new social reality, guidelines for the practice and evaluation of the style and exemplar models. The claim that intercultural communication is a style-specific theory is significant inasmuch as it guides and clarifies research goals. Consequently, as a style-specific theory, intercultural communication research should focus on describing this style of communication thoroughly before attempting to generalize about human communication. Scholars need to understand the parameters of the intercultural communication style first , then it will be appropriate to formulate generalizations about human communication.

A focus on the development of intercultural communication as a style-specific theory should encourage researchers to find the best means of

describing intercultural encounters and explicating the most critical factors in this type of encounter. I propose discourse analysis as a research tool to help build a style-specific theory of intercultural communication.

Discourse analysis concentrates on the study of conversation, especially dyadic conversation. Dyadic conversation is probably the most frequent form of intercultural communication,but a source of insight rarely studied in an intercultural setting. Intercultural researchers want to discover how members of other cultures interact, but they also seek to understnad and explicate what happens when members of different cultures interact. Discourse analysis can provide a means of examining what actually happens in interactions across cultures. Discourse analyists focus on conversation and I propose that conversation should be one of the foundations in intercultural research as well.

Nofsinger(1981) has provided a good summary of the dimensions of conversation that discourse analyists explore. These four dimensions of conversation are 1) participant outcomes, 2)episode structures, 3) communicative operations and 4) conversational resources.[2] The goals of discourse analysis are 1) the comprehensive description of the structure of conversation, 2) an explanation of the effects or outcomes of conversation and 3) an explanation of the knowledge about the conversation that the interactants bring with them into the situation.

The goals for the study of conversation are also appropriate goals for the study of intercultural conversation; however, one additional overall focus is necessary. In addition to the three basic goals, a researcher of intercultural conversation would also want to explicate the specific cultural factors that affect the interaction. In other words, particular attention should be paid to changes in the structure of the conversation

or the outcomes of the conversation based on cultural differences. Of significant interest would be how interactants vary in the knowledge they bring with them about the conversation.

There is some precedent for the suggestion that intercultural communication researchers explore discourse analysis. Schneider (1982) has also proposed this union. He feels that it would be a productive avenue of research in doing comparative studies of discourse behavior. Schneider also advocates discourse analysis to "develop . . . generalizations of discourse behavior" (p.8). This goal is inappropriate for the method he advocates as he is striving for a general theory of communication. It is my contention that discourse analysis can best be used as a tool for description contributing to a style-specific theory not a general one.

For discourse analysis to become a fruitful avenue of research for scholars in intercultural communication, some changes are needed in the traditional approach to the study of conversation. I propose that discourse analysts view themselves as rhetorical critics. Although this is a significant departure for discourse analysts and rhetorical critics, there is some precedent for this proposal. Goodall and Phillips (1981) have suggested that discourse analysis could profit from adopting a critical approach and Baker's (1983) recent study involving the criticism of small group conversation demonstrated the viability of this approach. For the purposes of this paper, I will highlight the most significant reasons for adopting a critical stance in the study of conversation.[3]

There are several advantages to the adoption of a rhetorical stance in analyzing discourse in intercultural encounters. First, a rhetorical critical approach can provide more information about the interaction. Traditionally, discourse analysts focus on only one aspect of a conversation.[4]

A critic considers all of the salient dimensions and then determines which are most important to explain what happened in the interaction. Furthermore, a critic evaluates the discourse in addition to describing it. Therefore, a critic can contributs to the guidelines of the practice of a communication style, in this case, intercultural communication. Consequently, the first advantage of a critical stance is more information - description and evaluation.

The second advantage presumes that a critic will adopt an experiential stance. The experiential stance assumes that "no special pattern exists for the study of public discourse" and that "discourse must continually be studied afresh" (Scott and Brock,1980:146). In other words, an experiential critic has no predetermined set of tools to study the discourse. In an intercultural encounter, this critical stance would minimize the interference of an ethnocentric bias in the analysis of the discourse. The critic would focus on the discourse itself, not on a set of culturally determined categories.

The third advantage of a rhetorical perspective also concerns the critic. Tc explain and describe discourse in an intercultural encounter, the critic must have a multicultural perspective. In other words, he or she must know the values and communication norms of the other culture in addition to being aware of his or her own cultural assumptions about the interaction under study.

The three advantages of adopting a rhetorical perspective focus on providing more information about the interaction and increasing the levels of awareness of the researcher. The role that I have outlined for the critic of intercultural conversation meets the basic criteria for doing intercultural research. Those criteria are to shed the "trappings of

ethnocentrism" and adopt a multicultural perspective, which is the exemplar model of the intercultural communication style.

In summary, this paper has explored some directions in intercultural communication research. Suggestions were made in order to provide a theoretical framework that can guide the choosing of appropriate methods of study. I argued for a style-specific theory of intercultural communication and the use of discourse analysis as a means of meeting the goals of that kind of theory. Lastly, I suggested that taking a rhetorical critical approach to the study of conversation would increase the fruitfulness of the endeavor.

NOTES

1. For evidence of these trends, see basic intercultural textbooks such as Condon and Yousef (1975) or Samovar and Porter (1982).

2. The definitions of each of Nofsinger's dimensions of conversation are the following:
   1. Participant outcomes: "the social and psychological states of the participants in the conversational episode that result in a significant way from interacting in the episode."

   2. Episode structures: "the conversational patterns formed by the types and sequences of communicative operations produced by participants in episodes."

   3. Communicative operations: "the coordinational, informational, instrumental, and social functions performed by the participants in a conversational episode."

   4. Conversational resources: "the shared background knowledge, processing rules, definition of the situation, and the momentarily-available linguistic expressions, nonverbal cues, and perceptions of the immediate context which can be used to construct conversation and execute communicative operations."

3. For more extensive arguments, see Baker (1983).

4. For examples of studies in discourse analysis, see Corsaro (1977) and Schegloff (1968).

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